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ABSTRACT

Whether one label for teen problems is "generation gap" or "lack of self-esteem," youth are not given the respect or consideration they deserve. Loftquist (1987) reports three styles that represent the attitudes of adults toward working with youth. In style 1, adults view youth as objects. In style 2, adults view youth as recipients of programs. In style 3, adults view youth as resources for developing and implementing programs. Extension professionals need proven models to help shape attitudes of adults. North Carolina's Teens Reaching Youth (TRY) program, conducted in 1987, was conceptualized in Loftquist's style 3 mode. It was designed to empower adults to accept teens as resources. During the program, an adult coach was teamed with two or three teens to give coaches first-hand experience with successful teen acceptance of responsibility. The group formed a TRY team to teach younger youth or to train other teens and adults to teach. Team members agreed on what each team member would contribute, and adult and youth volunteers were trained in the content at the same time. Observation of adult coaches made during the program reflected positive growth in their attitudes toward teens. When programs are designed according to style 3, youth are empowered to function responsibly and to assume adult-like roles. (KC)

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Empowering Adults to Value Teenage Youth as Volunteer Resources for Delivering Educational Programs

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Introduction

Teen problems have been a source of adult concern for years. A current review of newspapers, popular magazines and professional journals suggest that teen problems are rooted in lack of self esteem. In the late 1960's, teen problems were associated with the term "generation gap". In both cases adults were critical factors in the problem.

Self esteem was identified as the number one problem of youth in North Carolina 4-H's plan of work for 1983-87. (People's Plan '87.) Social science research supports that self esteem is acquired through relationships with significant people. Parents are the role models and significant others at home, while other adults are role models in the community and school. A 1984 research report on Young Adolescents concluded that: "Programs should take seriously young adolescents' growing need for autonomy and self-determination. Programs should provide young adolescents with experience in making decisions, setting rules, and shaping program content, while at the same time making the limits of this freedom explicit." Most of the time adults are the key decision makers in programs designed to meet teen needs. Therefore it is critical they have an involving attitude toward
teens.

Friedenberg (1969) says the term "generation gap" reflects a conflict of interest rather than mutual misunderstanding between youth and adults. He goes on to say "youth is a discrimininated against minority in America." He said

they are excluded from economic development and are forced to supply armed forces. Other authors suggest the term means a disparity between the values of generation. One report (Debuskey 1968) said adults and teens become alienated because adults find it difficult to identify with teens due to repressed feelings.

Whether the label is "generation gap" or "lack of self esteem," youth are not given the respect or consideration they deserve. Burnison,(1986) said, "society sees young people as consumers, not producers; receivers, not creators." It is this attitude, acted out at the individual level that impacts on youth self esteem. Both adults as individuals and society in general would benefit from a change in attitude. Burnison goes on to say: "Youthful energy is a vast resource of leadership potential. How do we applaud it, guide it and tap it; rather than fear it, diffuse it and control it?"

The purpose of this paper is to: 1)propose a conceptual framework for viewing adult attitudes toward youth; 2)describe a model leadership development program designed to change adult attitudes.

What are Adult Attitudes Toward Youth As Resources for Educational Programs?

An official goal of the North Carolina 4-H program is to involve youth extensively into decision making for program development and delivery.(The North Carolina 4-H Mission Statement, 1983) One barrier that has been

identified is adults who have not been prepared through educational programs or experience to view youth as resources. Therefore, Extension educators need models to use to structure experiences to accomplish that goal.

Loftquist, (1987) reports three styles that represent the attitudes of adults toward working with youth . Style 1 adults view youth as objects. In Style 2, adults view youth as recipients of programs. In Style 3, adults view youth as resources for developing and implementing programs.

With Style 1, Loftquist says the adult sees little value in the young person and therefore controls the youth to serve his self interest. Many times this style has very negative outcomes for the youth involved. An extreme example is a child pornographer. A less extreme example is the adult who thinks he knows best and youth input is never considered. This is frequently a parental attitude and is often seen in adults who work with youth in paid or volunteer roles. Ellis (1983) notes that all too often when volunteer help is needed, children are used for their bodies, not their minds. Since they frequently come with parents, the parents are considered the volunteers, while children are viewed only as helpers.

Loftquist describes the Style 2 attitude as youth being viewed as recipients of the benefits of the program. The controling adult may allow youth input and participation but only because of the benefits he would obtain because of his participation. For example, an officer in a youth organization may be invited to a Board of Directors meeting to be seen as a shinning example of the youth he represents and for the value he would receive personally from attending. He is not expected or asked to contribute anything.

Style 3, Loftquist says, is founded on a genuine respect for the contribution young people can make in planning, operation and evaluation of a youth organization. This style acknowledges that both leadership roles and decision making are a shared responsibility of both youth and adults. It may mean that adults as well as youth will need to learn skills in shared decision making, coaching and teamwork.

In a study of their teen leadership program, Orr and Gobelli (1987) found that teens perceived adult volunteers to:

1) view them as responsible and capable volunters for 4-H.
2) believe it to be important to involve teens in 4-H programs.
3) practice 'coaching' rather than an 'authoritative' leadership style."

In North Carolina, Focused Group Interviews conducted by Groff (1987) revealed the following trends among 4-H volunteer leaders attitudes:

1) Younger children look up to teens, therefore, teens can accomplish more when they are in the primary leadership roles.
2) Teens respond very positively when placed in equal power situations; they have more imagination and will work harder.
3) Rewards to teens are greater according to their involvement.

Rhinehart (1987) in a survey of 4-H volunteer leader attitudes towards youth found that 4-H volunteers have a positive attitude toward youth as resources. The majority felt the following about teens:

1) They are capable of teaching subject matter with the counsel of an adult advisor.

2) They can teach most audiences except handicapped and senior citizens.

Responses on how they would actually work with a group of teens to teach a nutrition workshop varied considerably from a controlling role to a coaching role.

Why Empower Adults

Empowering adults to view youth as resources is beneficial. Adults interviewed by Groff (Focus Group Interview with 4-H Volunteer Adult Leaders 1987) expressed feelings of shared responsibility with teens. They said teens relieved them of work, helped initiate ideas to younger 4-H'ers, and handled many time consuming projects. They said younger 4-H'ers benefitted by the quality individualized instruction they received. Groff (1987) found in the TRY program that the 4-H program realized growth due to the outreach of teens to new audiences. 4-H clubs and councils also benefit from increased leadership skills of youth who function as volunteers in planning, implementing and evaluating the program. Society benefits Burnison (1986) says from involvement of youth due to the self esteem they develop. Youth who are treated with respect and are given opportunities for leadership development bridge the transition to adulthood with less difficulty. Involving youth as volunteers is also a valuable step toward preparing citizens of tomorrow. Ellis (1983) writes that volunteering teaches citizenship better than either school work or entry level jobs.

A Chicago Area Youth Poll (1985) found major themes motivating teens to

volunteer to be self esteem, caring for others and community pride. In contrast, the study found a primary reason for student to quit in a volunteer job to be attitudes of adults such as lack of respect, impatience, and being too bossy. Loftquist (1986) says that both adults and youth may need to learn skills of shared decision making. Other learning opportunities are in the areas of coaching, teambuilding, delegating and communicating. Empowered adults increase their self esteem and become more valuable citizens. In the final analysis, working cooperatively with teens as resources in educational programs creates a learning and growing experience for adults and a powerful climate for self esteem growth for youth.

If teens are going to volunteer their talents and time, it is apparent that adults will need to be involved in a meaningful way. A basic assumption according to one organization which programs for teens (Selecting the Leader for Effective Teen Programs 1984) is that the leader is the principle ingredient of successful teen programs. They suggest that it is not enough for leaders to have technical knowledge and skills, but that their attitudes and values are both important and basic. They say attitudes and values permeate everything that happens. Behavior is shaped by these qualities. They note: "Teenagers are quick to spot phoniness in the leader, so that any chance of learning is lost."

Extension professionals need proven models to help shape attitudes of adults. Both educational programs and experience are needed to impact on behaviors. W.K. Kellogg Foundation Inc. recognized the need to involve more youth volunteers in the 4-H program in 1986. They made a $2.4 million grant available to National 4-H Council for development of volunteer models that

work to meet identified needs and develop leadership skills. North Carolina 4-H received an $80,000 grant to develop and test one of the four national models on youth volunteer development.

Teens Reaching Youth to Change Adult Attitudes

North Carolina's Teens Reaching Youth (TRY) program, (1987) was conceptualized in Loftquist's Style 3 mode. It was designed to empower adults to accept teens as resources. Two objectives applied to adults: 1) To acquire an understanding of the helper/mentor role; 2) To accept teens as co-leaders. The design of the program treated adults in the following ways:

1) An adult coach was teamed with two or three teens to give adult "coaches" first hand experience with successful teen acceptance of responsibility. The group formed a TRY team with one of three goals to achieve: a) teach younger youth six hours of packaged curriculum; b) write six hours of lesson plans and pilot test with a group of younger youth; c) train other teens and adults to teach.

2) All team members signed a team agreement specifying exactly what each team member would contribute to help achieve the team goals. This strategy gave each team member equal power

3) Adult and youth volunteer participants were trained in the same content at the same time. While adults were given the label of "coach", everyone had opportunities to coach each other. Investigation of personal leadership styles and task/skill preferences allowed team members to understand that nobody else is exactly like them or will function like they do.

Through teamwork required at the training, and as each TRY team fulfilled its contract, adult attitudes slowly changed. Initial perception of adults toward teens was not surveyed. However, interviews, observation, and unsolicited comments gathered during the project, indicated the adults were functioning in a Style 2 or Style 3 mode. Some adults who participated solely to make this opportunity available to their own children came to regard their teens as different people. They saw them blossom into confident, responsible and capable young adults. Some specific comments were: "I didn't know the teens had it in them", "The teens took it over. They did more than the adults.", "I have a new respect for the teens as teachers." An Extension Horse Specialist noted that "Prior skepticism from adult volunteer leaders about teaching subject matter has been removed." These verbal comments validated testing results. A semantic differential instrument assessing adult perception of "coach" and "teenage teacher" was administered before and after the formal training program. A significant difference in improved attitude was found in both concepts.

Observation of adult coaches made during the program reflected their personal growth . One older teen moved easily into the role of Coordinator of the State Training of Trainers team. Her other team members included several adults who were assigned responsibilities. The Teen coordinator finalized all arrangements, ensured communications among other trainers and monitored quality control. Another coach supported her teens in doing their contract in an innovative way. Numerous coaches relented as their teens made it clear they were going to find an audience they wanted to work with instead of one the coach suggested.

Some comments written by adults on final reports are as follows: "I think the program has been very effective. I certainly enjoyed it. I know my leadership skills have greatly increased. Please continue the program." "The children have learned a lot and in most cases the adult leaders have too."

Conclusions and Implications

After completing the TRY program and working with youth as resources, adults had more positive attitudes toward teens. Retrospective interviews with the adults have indicated that the attitudes became more positive after completion of the program.

Adult attitudes can be changed with regard to teens as resources when educational programs are designed according to Style 3. With Style 3, youth are empowered to function responsibly and to assume adult like roles. Concurrently, adults are empowered to involve teens as a valuable resource and partner in the delivery of programs. Empowering comes because adults accept youth and involve youth as resources in program development and delivery.

The TRY program is one example of how to improve adult attitudes toward teens. Adults are empowered to involve youth while also helping teens to be responsible volunteers. Since studies on 4-H show adult volunteer leaders to already possess a good attitude toward teens as volunteers, the positive changes resulting from the TRY program must have some explanation. Possibly the extent of the adults' willingness to accept teen involvement in roles of planning and teaching could have been expanded. The design of teamwork with

equality of treatment in training and in expectations could be the critical element.

The entire area of what are adult attitudes toward youth and how to empower adults to change attitudes is non-existent in the literature. Obviously more research is needed on both topics. The findings in studies of 4-H volunteers lead to the following questions: 1) Are 4-H leaders different from the general population of adults?: 2) Why are they different? 3) What are the factors that contribute to changes in attitude?. 4) Do teens have a corresponding change in attitude?

The teenage audience is a vast and valuable resource to society. When adults ignore that potential they are limiting their own potential to grow. They are also limiting effectiveness of programs designed to address teen needs. The benefits of programs like Teens Reaching Youth extend beyond changes in attitude and behavior of adults toward youth. The meaningful outcome is that both adult and youth participants develop greater self esteem and competence to communicate and relate with each other.

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